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HATEWATCH

## Racism rampant at California city council meetings on sanctuary policies

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by Stephen Piggott

For the past two months, a campaign orchestrated by national anti-immigrant hate group the [Federation for American Immigration Reform](#) (FAIR) and its legal arm the Immigration Reform Law Institute (IRLI) has mobilized a small but vocal group of activists hell-bent on pushing city council members in Orange County, and other parts of southern California, to take a stance against the state's sanctuary policies.

IRLI enlisted support from cities to attach their name to an amicus brief it filed in opposition to California's Values ACT SB54, a law preventing state and local law enforcement agencies from using money or personnel to investigate or detain persons based on their immigration status. Other options for cities to fight back include filing their own suits, passing an ordinance to not comply with SB54. FAIR has offered "advice and legal assistance to all jurisdictions," according to a [report](#) by the *Los Angeles Times*. FAIR has also been [busy](#) emailing city council members and quietly promising them that their cities will be represented free of charge if they decide to file lawsuits against the state.

Carlos Perea of [Resilience Orange County](#) has been monitoring the anti-sanctuary campaign closely. "It is unacceptable that local elected officials are working with FAIR to launch a hate campaign that scapegoats immigrants for a political agenda that serves one purpose, to further polarize and divide our communities," Perea told Hatewatch. "The public needs to know which elected officials are working with hate groups and they should be held accountable."

Perea is right. FAIR has an almost four decades-old track record of racism, starting with its founder, white nationalist John Tanton who wrote in 1993, "I've come to the point of view that for European-American society and culture to persist requires a European-American majority, and a clear one at that." FAIR received over \$1 million in funding from the Pioneer Fund, one of the most influential hate groups of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a group founded with an explicit eugenicist mission. FAIR's leadership has routinely espoused racist rhetoric. Its longtime president Dan Stein once warned that immigrants are "getting into competitive breeding."

Despite FAIR's toxicity, city councils across Southern California have taken FAIR up on their offer of pro bono help. IRLI hailed the plethora of cities voting against SB54 as a "firestorm of opposition." Over 25 cities to date have voted in opposition and the goal of anti-immigrant groups is to quadruple this number by the end of the summer. FAIR is coy about how deep its involvement is in this effort, attempting to portray it as a grassroots uprising. But emails obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union of California via Freedom of Information Act requests show that FAIR's national field director, Susan Tully, has been busy emailing city council officials and offering pro bono assistance. Tully has also been meeting with city council members across Southern California.

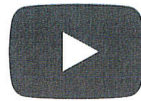
FAIR is also quiet on the fact that its orchestrated campaign has whipped a small band of anti-sanctuary activists from California and elsewhere into a frenzy, with this group traveling from city to city on a nightly basis and stoking racial tensions at city council meetings. Hatewatch has spoken to multiple meeting attendees and reviewed videos of the recent city council meetings which reveal blatant examples of hate speech and threatening behavior stemming from this small band of anti-sanctuary activists. "Anti-sanctuary people showing at city council meetings in OC have become more aggressive and they feel more emboldened to launch racially charged slurs. They have become more aggressive that at times they have physically confronted young people attending city council meetings," said Perea.

The activists do not represent one group, ideology or ethnicity, but are rather a longtime anti-immigrant activists, newer activists inspired by Donald Trump, more hardcore elements including some who have espoused holocaust denial and white nationalist tropes, along with the leader of an anti-LGBT hate group. Coupled with anti-immigrant animus, anti-LGBT and antisemitic rhetoric has been a mainstay at the city council meetings over the past two months.



Reports have also noted that anti-sanctuary speakers have depicted undocumented immigrants as criminals who harbor disease. In one video reviewed by Hatewatch, Mike McGetrick of the anti-immigrant group We the People Rising can be seen confronting a younger attendee outside the meeting in Los Alamitos screaming, “I want you out of my country you illegal alien creep, you weirdo!”

Los Alimitos

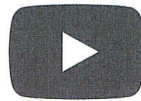


According to the *Daily Bulletin*, antisemitic remarks were directed toward rabbis at least three of the meetings. Rabbi Stephen Einstein who is a supporter of the sanctuary law, was told to “get circumcised,” at one meeting. “Those are telling comments. Many people who have issues with current immigration policy also hold virulently racist views toward other groups,” Einstein told the *Bulletin*. In a video of the Huntington Beach meeting on April 2, “Harim Uziel,” who runs the “Hardcore American Patriot” Facebook page can be heard shouting about circumcision at Einstein during his public remarks.

At a more recent Huntington Beach meeting, anti-sanctuary activist Gracey Van Der Mark who has a history of making antisemitic comments on her Facebook page addressed the city council. Van Der Mark’s YouTube account even had a playlist titled, “Holocaust Hoax?” The playlist included a video from rabidly anti-LGBT pastor Steven Anderson titled, “The Holocaust Hoax Exposed.” Van Der Mark, who has since deleted the playlist, formerly served on a number of government committees in Huntington Beach but was removed from them in early May due to her racist social media posts and videos.

Blanket attacks on people of color and others have also been a hallmark of the city council meetings. Genevieve Peters, a leader in the anti-sanctuary effort, has a number of videos on her Facebook account from the various meetings she has attended. In a [video](#) published on April 4 at the Escondido meeting, Peters can be heard yelling, “call ICE” at Latino speakers. At the meeting in Westminster on April 11, Peters repeatedly claims that an LGBT activist who addressed the city council has a “mental illness.” Peters routinely attacks transgender people on her Facebook account saying they have a “mental disorder” and need “psychotherapy.” Also at the Westminster meeting, she berates a man with shouts of “Mental illness!” after he mentioned he has husband. At the same meeting, Peters repeatedly yelled “Go back to the hellhole you came from,” to a woman who was at the meeting with her two small children.

Westminster



Joining Peters at many of the meetings, including Westminster, was Arthur Schaper. Schaper is the head of the California chapter of the anti-LGBT group Mass Resistance, a group whose founder [falsely claimed](#) that no homosexuals died in the Holocaust and that the pink triangle the Nazis forced imprisoned gays to wear actually signified Catholic priests. Schaper has a history of disruptive activity at city council meetings and was [arrested](#) at a meeting in Huntington Beach in 2017.

Local residents who spoke to Hatewatch are appalled by the ugly manifestation of the anti-sanctuary campaign in their cities. “In my observation, the racially charged language came from a single group of outsiders, that organized and went from city council to city council. I did

not hear the language coming from residents of our city,” said resident Trina Mangione.

Jody Kyle has attended multiple city council meetings in Orange County and blames elected officials for accepting FAIR’s advances. “They are trying to make their own political fortunes and careers by capitalizing on human misery. The local elected officials insist on discussing SB54 in terms of ‘state over-reach’ and ‘giving local law enforcement the freedom to act.” Says Kyle. “I believe SB54 is a way to talk about Latinos, and Mexicans, and Arabs and Muslims without actually saying the words.”

With multiple city council meetings scheduled to take place in the coming weeks, FAIR and its band of anti-sanctuary activists shows no signs of slowing down.

Photo credit: Jeff Gritchen/The Orange County Register via AP Images

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